

The Potter Family Grimoire

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

The door to the small, dusty shop opened. A worn, battered bell sang out a tiny ring. The man sitting in his chair behind the counter smiled. His weathered hand reached out and plucked a thick leather manifest off a shelf. His ancient fingers pried open the stiff binding and began flipping from page to page.

Eventually the old man stopped on a blank page. He set the thick volume on a nearby shelf. He'd need this book later.

Then he looked up and smiled at the rather small young man who couldn't seem to decide whether to walk into the shop or to close the door and walk away. The old man's welcoming smile must have worked. The young man walked into the shop.

"Hello," the thin voice said. The young man seemed nervous.

"Hello," the old man responded before standing up from his chair. "What may I help you with?" His voice filled the entire room and had little echoes ringing from spot to spot. His voice, his personality filled the space almost to bursting.

The young man took an involuntary step back.

"Well, uh, I've been all over Diagon Alley trying to find the shop that carries Chocolate Frog cards. My friend collects them and he's missing...err, Circe, I think. I wanted to see if I could get that one for him."

The old man nodded once and then beckoned the young man closer with his curled finger.

"That's a very kind gesture, young master. I do, indeed, have some cards, but not the set you're looking for. I have several of the original Chocolate Frog cards, back from the 1780s."

His hand was already under the counter, locating an album. He pulled it out and set it on the counter.

“That sounds expensive,” the young man said. “My friend might like it...but the cost, it might make him....”

“Jealous?”

The young man looked down, but then nodded.

“Yes, yes. Quite right to avoid inciting the baser emotions.”

The old man returned the album underneath the counter without even opening it. Then he fixed his gray eyes on the young man.

“I suppose you wish to ask me what I sell here.”

The young man looked up, a bit startled, from his inspection of the crevices of the floor. “Yes.”

“I sell everything and anything.”

The young man obviously didn’t believe him. “How?”

The old man smiled more broadly. “Magic.”

Harry tried to mask the sour expression that erupted, for a moment, on his face. “Everyone says that when they really don’t want to explain.”

The old man nodded. “Yes, it is convenient. Probably too convenient and eligible for misuse as an explanation. I do use magic, among other things, to procure items worthy for resale, but my techniques are far more profound than that.” The young man seemed not to understand. “Let me say that my methods are trade secrets. I would not want anyone else to be able to do what I do.”

A glimpse of understanding entered the young man’s face. “So, what might someone like me purchase from you?”

A large, genuine smile burst over the shopkeeper's worn face. "Oh, clever question! Very good. As I do not know you, however, I cannot answer you. But...you can tell me what you desire above all else...and then we can work from there."

"Desire?" the young man said. His face went slack for a brief moment, as if he were suddenly deep within his past trying to reconstruct or remember something. "It does not do to dwell on dreams, and forget to live.' Someone told me that when all I could think of was my desire."

The old man nodded. "I do not sell dreams, yet it is wise advice in general. Please tell me what had you so engaged."

"I looked at...a magical artifact that showed me a life with my parents, had I not grown up an orphan."

The old man had a sympathetic look on his face. "Yes, all too common these last years. So...you wish to have your family back?"

The young man seemed upset by the idea for a moment, before he shook his head. "That's impossible. But...I know nothing of them, other than how they looked. I wish to know my family. To appreciate them. To have a family history if I cannot have a mother and a father."

The old man looked into the young man's eyes for a few moments before his hand dropped under the counter and brought out a thick volume.

"You must tell me your name, then, if I am to try to locate something appropriate."

"I am the last Potter. Harry Potter." The young man expected a reaction of some sort. The old man changed nothing of his appearance or demeanor.

"Potter." His fingers flipped through the thick, ink-stained pages. "A common name, I think. Possibly too common. But...oh yes, that might very well be the thing."

“Sir?”

“Just one moment. I have something in my back room that you should examine. Just a moment, young master.”

The young man stood in the odd store for a few minutes. His eyes wandered over shelves that contained contraptions he didn't understand. Days afterward, if he spoke of this place, which he never did, he might have compared the space to a Borgin and Burkes that didn't feel like it was going to swallow him whole.

This store felt...comforting.

It was a highly magical place. Even a young wizard with only two years of schooling could tell that. It felt like a more intense version of the Great Hall of Hogwarts, the flows of magic, the enchantments layered everywhere about.

Harry turned on his heel and looked at a shelf built into the counter near the door.

It contained items that he had never seen or heard of before. There was the skeleton of some kind of lizard...walking inside a glass bottle, but never moving from its position. Walking, walking, walking, a perpetual motion machine.

There was a green bottle that appeared empty but emitted small rings of smoke from its top. Green, then yellow, then tan, and then a deep purple. The colors cycled like this without change.

Further down the shelf there was a silver and deep blue stone that pulsed with magical energy, a warm, pleasing magic.

His hand reached out to touch the stone. He couldn't stop himself...nor, if he was honest with himself, did he want to stop.

He wanted to feel that beautiful magic.

“Be careful, young master,” the old man said, his presence once again palpable in the small shop. Harry’s hand dropped to his side, then he turned around slowly with a sheepish grin on his face.

“Never touch a magical object unless you know precisely what it does.”

Harry’s eyebrows nearly went to his hairline when he finally caught onto the import of the warning. “Oh, right. Sorry. I should have thought about that. I usually get in trouble for doing something before thinking about it.”

“It’s no problem, young master. Just be careful. That particular stone is quite beautiful. It carries a wonderful curse....”

“Excuse me, but how can a curse be wonderful?”

The old man walked from the doorway to his backroom to his normal spot behind the counter. He could almost reach out with his arm to touch the odd stone, but he did not. “It imparts to anyone who touches it a kind of euphoria. The closer one remains to the stone the better one feels. Many people, it is rumored, have perished after touching the stone as they refuse to find food or water...as it would mean moving far away from the cursed stone.”

“Why keep it here?” Harry asked.

“It is useful. Not everyone would use it for ill intent. Say that a dangerous creature took up residence near your home. You could purchase this stone, arrange for the creature to touch it, and then move the stone somewhere further away. The creature would inevitably follow.”

“It doesn’t just work on people?”

The old shopkeeper smiled and shook his head. “Of course not. Magic can do almost anything one asks of it...provided one knows how to ask and is willing to pay the full price. Indeed, let me show you a fine work of magic, the item that I believe will teach you about your family.”

Harry smiled and his eyes moved toward a thick book on the counter that hadn't been there before the storekeeper disappeared into his back room.

The old man reached that part of the counter first and turned the volume around so that Harry could read it. The dark gray leather seemed blackened over a good portion of the cover.

But he could see part of a coat of arms and the word "Potter" in the upper left portion.

The old man turned back to his ledger recording the books he owned and read his own notes. "I've had this volume for thirty-two years, bought as part of a lot from the wreckage of a manor house after a fire. I only got around to cataloging that box eight years ago it seems...my, my, I really do have too much in my warehouse."

The old man's eyes looked up and then he stared at the partially burnt book. "It's of a fine quality and is several hundred years old. I have not been able to open it...so that likely means it's blood bonded."

"Blood bonded?"

The old man nodded. "It is an ancient practice, fallen into disuse it seems by your not recognizing the term. Precious artifacts and spell books were bonded to a person or a family line. As a security mechanism, it's hard to bypass...."

Harry nodded. "So, if my blood opens this book, then I'm related to the people who wrote in this book?"

"I believe that would be true," the old man said.

A wide, deep smile emerged onto Harry's otherwise cautious face. It was a chance to have contact with family, distant family. If his blood was the right blood.

A few moments later Harry asked for a knife or something sharp. The old man reached under the counter and produced a thin glass rod. He snapped it in half and handed one piece to Harry.

Harry eagerly jabbed the tip of his thumb. A few drops of his blood fell onto the burnt side of the book. Nothing else seemed to happen.

Harry looked like someone had just told him treacle tart had been banned at Hogwarts. He set the broken half of the glass rod on the counter.

The old man picked it up and thrust it back at Harry. "It has your blood on it. Never forget that blood is a very important part of many types of magic. You should keep this with you until you are able to destroy it completely."

"Thank you. And thank you for finding this book. I'm just sorry it didn't seem to work...."

"Touch it. Lift the cover of the book. Don't assume."

Once he heard the order, Harry couldn't stop his hand. His finger caressed the charred leather, then hooked underneath the book board. He pulled his whole hand back gently, expecting not the slightest give. But...the cover opened.

His gentle movement changed. The cover flew the rest of the way open and Harry's face was almost inside the book. Inside was a spell. A spell to dry a piece of clay. A spell for a potter.

Harry flipped through the book. More spells for a potter. Then spells to protect a house. Then other things. Things he didn't understand at all, even as the handwriting became more familiar and the words less archaic.

It was a spellbook. It was a spellbook created and maintained by Harry's family.

"This is great!"

The old man looked at the volume and then smiled. "A Grimoire is a special thing, young master. It is the accumulation of generations of wisdom. A family with a powerful collection of spells – and a long abiding purpose for all of its members – is far stronger than any other. But, you must be careful with this book. You can choose to share the knowledge as you wish...but how do you know if the recipient will remain an ally or friend? Would you choose to equip an enemy; to give him your best tools and weapons?"

Harry promptly closed the book. "I get your point. Keep it secret."

"It is a Book of Shadows for that reason; hidden and secret."

Harry stroked the cover as if the book were a valued pet. "A book isn't a person; it can't talk to me or answer my questions...but I feel happier with this burnt old book than I have in a long time. It's a connection."

"I am glad I had something for you in my back room. It's a very personal item, but I'm afraid I do need to charge you one galleon for it."

"That's all? This...."

"One galleon only," the shopkeeper said, smiling. "I agree that it is a good deal for you, but I only need one galleon for it."

Harry nodded and smiled. "I would have paid a lot more for this. But...here is your galleon." The large gold coin fell on its edge on the counter and twirled for a moment before gravity pulled it down.

"I have not often been accused of excess generosity, young master." The old man's gnarled fingers snapped up the coin and it disappeared inside his robes.

"Thanks again, sir. Maybe I will come back another day and talk with you again. School doesn't start up for a few more days...."

"It would be a pleasure."

The door closed and the light inside the shop seemed to dim.

The shopkeeper returned his 'book of books' to its place and then sat down. He turned and picked up his leather-bound manifest and found the first blank page he had previously opened the book to. He scrawled the number 147 at the top of the page and began describing his meeting with the young master.

Minutes passed and the quill continued its narration. When he finished, the galleon he'd received from the young master reappeared in his hand.

The old man pulled out a worn box from under his counter and opened the lid. It seemed far too small to hold as much gold as was now inside it. But...magic was magic.

He dropped the coin inside the box. "My one hundred forty-seventh galleon," he said, closing the lid and returning the box to its home.

Business was slow. Very few found the door and none ever returned, even if the shopkeeper would have liked the company.

He had a long way to go until he could sleep or leave the two rooms of his shop. The penalty...for his freedom...was a payment of 5,000 galleons, no more than one from each worthy soul.

This punishment was nothing compared to what some of the true ancients had once faced: Ixion and his wheel, Sisyphus and his boulder, Tantalus's unending thirst as he lay in a pool of undrinkable water, Prometheus and the eagle ripping out his liver day in and day out.

The old shopkeeper blotted the wet ink from his thick customer ledger and set it back on its shelf. Then he returned to his chair...and waited. It could be a day or a decade before the door next opened...before he could earn another galleon and get a single step closer to release.

At least this young master had been nice and kind. Some of the people considered 'worthy' by the enchantments on this place...well, weren't nice or pleasant.

He thought it likely the young master would pass the test he had just carried from this store. He never found out one way or the other – part of the enduring punishment, boredom mixed with unanswered curiosity – but he believed this one would succeed in whatever test he had to pass.

Destiny usually offered the necessary tools to succeed...but it was up to the individual whether to pick them up and wield them.

The old man relaxed in his chair and, within moments, he forgot entirely about his last customer. From time to time he read his ledger to amuse himself, as he could read none of the books available for sale here. But he never remembered any of it unless he wrote it down...and even then his long-term memory retained nothing of the details.

The past was beyond him. The present was his damnation. All that remained.... His eyes remained fixed on the door, hopeful.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

Harry Potter awoke, excited. He had five more days until his third year at Hogwarts began, but the book he now possessed was so much better than going back to school.

He had spent most of his time before falling asleep yesterday looking at the most recent entries. He had gotten to learn something about his family, his grandfather and his grandmother. He had read a brief announcement of the birth of his father.

Today...today, he wanted to return to that shop and thank the strange man who had found this precious book.

He got up, got dressed, and walked downstairs to the main room of the Leaky Cauldron. He had a proper breakfast, far more food than he'd ever been allotted at the Dursley's, and then set out into the Alley.

But he couldn't remember precisely where the store had been.

He wandered around until almost noon trying to locate the small shop. He'd thought he was close a few times, but nothing.

When he went into a small lunchery, his mind wandered away from the idea of finding the shop. Indeed, he placed the entire experience, sans the acquisition of the Grimoire, into a hazy portion of his memory.

The afternoon saw Harry out in London proper. He hadn't spent any time in the capital city. He had never been inside a massive toy store or inside Harrod's or walked along the Thames or seen the Houses of Parliament.

For the next several days, up until he began his third year at Hogwarts, he spent part of his day among the Muggles. He walked through the British Museum and wondered why he felt drawn to a few of the artifacts in the Egyptian and Greek exhibitions. He bought food in SoHo and ate at his first Chinese, Indian, Italian, and Russian restaurants. He caught a film in Leicester Square, ate far too much greasy popcorn, and blushed when he saw all the dirty advertisements posted in and around the phone boxes there, showing pictures of young women available to do anything for the right sum of money. He did wonder why so many of them claimed to speak Greek.

He bought new clothing. He acquired new shoes that actually fit him without requiring two or three layers of socks. He acted like a normal person, like a tourist come to a foreign locale. In a way, he was a stranger in a strange land, even if the place should have been familiar and commonplace to him.

He had the best week of his life, not least because of the time he spent reading his new book, the charred connection with the past, with his family and their accumulated wisdom.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

For some reason, the attack at Halloween – when Sirius Black sliced up the portrait guardian of Gryffindor Tower trying to get at Harry –

prompted Harry to return and reread portions of the Grimoire. He'd become so caught up in work and the Sirius Black business that he hadn't spent much time examining the book in a few weeks.

On November 2, after not paying much attention in his classes, Harry sat down outside on a still-pleasant day and pulled the Grimoire from its hiding spot inside his cloak.

He read for a few hours, until he began to lose the light in the sky, and had a few ideas to protect himself.

Hermione seemed so busy this year, so Harry decided he needed to work on this project without even asking for a bit of help from her. He knew several of the things – spells and wards and rituals – were a bit beyond what he could comprehend. But...he was best at doing, not understanding.

He learned his spells and prepared for the worst, but more important than that was that he began to really learn and understand the nature of the Potter Family. He began to know why his father had fought against Voldemort, why his grandfather had once fought against Grindelwald, why every generation or two a Potter fought against tyranny. Some times it was to help end a goblin rebellion – without slaughtering all of the prickly, yet still sentient beings – and other times it was to help end a series of witch hunts – without slaughtering all of those prickly, yet still sentient Muggles. Once a Potter had even helped end the Annual Grand Werewolf Hunt on the grounds it was cruel and unnecessary. Some Potters fought in the political realm; some were military leaders; others wielded their influence from the merchant class, as master potters or importers of trade goods or master constructors and wardsmen; a few had even gone into teaching to lead the next generations.

All of this was new knowledge for Harry. Beyond his father's love of Quidditch, he really hadn't known much of his personality, let alone that of his grandfather and other forbearers.

That made its impression even more strongly than his increase in practical magic, in his increased ability to defend himself, in his

enlarged arsenal of clever tricks and techniques to preserve and strengthen the Potter line.

Most importantly, through his connection to the past, Harry began to understand the concept of duty. The concept of the Potter Duty. Bravery for a cause. Power used with restraint and direction.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

17 April 1897

I hesitate to write down this newly crafted ward, not because it isn't valuable, but because it is almost too powerful to be safely deployed.

I implore my successors to exercise caution when working with the Energy Shield, developed by David Odgen Potter, my first cousin, after becoming fascinated by a muggle named Nikola Tesla. The man has been working with a type of energy called electricity and has demonstrated several unusual properties. David Potter wondered about this electricity and developed a method for harnessing it before he generalized the ward.

The Energy Shield described below takes in all forms of energy to strengthen itself. The caster expends an enormous amount of his own magic to commence the ward, then the natural environment powers and strengthens it from there. It accepts magical input as well as electrical discharge from lightning. It even works against the energy contained in a discharged bullet or a vicious wind storm. Once the ward has been erected nothing can pass through it, including fresh oxygen. That is the principle danger inherent in the design: once the ward is erected, the caster and anyone else inside the ward are completely protected from all outside actors, but have a limited amount of breathable air available to them.

Also, anyone or anything attempting to cross the ward...ceases to exist. All energy, even that contained in a living animal, such as a bird, is harnessed by the ward. This is the secondary danger of working with the ward. A careless caster could easily lose a hand or his whole person if he falls or bumps into the surface of the ward.

David Potter lost his eldest son, Johnathan, while he constructed this ward. The five year old ran right up to it before David turned and waved his son to stop. But the boy tripped on a stone and fell headfirst into the ward. The upper portion of his body ceased to exist. David took nearly a year before he completed his work after the tragic accident.

Note bene: Anyone working with this ward must be in a secured location. David's unsecure development work cost him and the family dearly.

This ward configuration has brought a great depth of tragedy to the family, but it may well be our finest creation. It can stop a Killing Curse or a rampaging werewolf. It is an ultimate level of defense in case of an attempted invasion of our estates. Permit only the strongest, magically and mentally, to learn this ward. It can kill those with insufficient magic or the lack of proper understanding of how and when to use it.

To use: prepare four runic tablets, bone or slate preferred. Runes must be written in wettable ash or ground iron ink. Blood must not be used under any circumstance (see below)

Prepare the four runic arrays copied on the next page. These are not standard elements of any formal runic language, but are most closely related to the Kar-loth variants of Norse runes.

Place the rune tablets at the perimeter of the protected area. The caster should be aware that the power required to commence the ward is related to the square of the area protected. Thus, a four foot area would require 16 units of magic, whereas a ten foot area would require 100 units. The largest area safely cast by David was eight hundred square feet, equivalent to 640,000 magical units, the upper limit of the strongest of the wizards in the Potter Family.

(However, one test, utilizing his own blood for the runic inscriptions, resulted in a near complete drain of his magic and the creation of a ward with an area one tenth the size he expected. David's being rendered unconscious stopped his casting and saved his life.)

The activation phrase is *res naturus facticiusque potestam purum invictumque fieri*.

A finite incantatem intoned by the caster will end the ward.

The length of time the ward may safely remain erected depends upon its size. One person inside a maximally sized ward, eight hundred square feet, should have sufficient air to survive for three hours. Two people will halve the safe length of usage.

David and I speculate, but have not tested, that multiple casters of this ward will expand the area of the ward on a logarithmic, rather than arithmetic, scale. It seems a difficult proposition to locate two or more Potters with sufficiently attuned magic to attempt a casting of this nature. I leave this opportunity to future generations....

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

The evening had swung from highs to lows. First, Ron had been kidnapped. Then, Harry had met Sirius Black...and Peter Pettigrew. Then he had learned much of the recent history he knew was wrong. Pettigrew was the traitor; Black was an innocent and Harry's godfather.

He had briefly pondered the possibility of living away from the Dursley's and starting a new kind of life.

Now...now, there was a werewolf loose, his godfather was incapacitated by the proximity of a hundred dementors, and Harry was the only one around to save them.

His first instinct was the Patronus Charm, but his first attempts were weak, barely stable mist shields.

Then he remembered the odd little necklace he had kept around his neck since early November. The four pieces of slate with odd runes on them, his first freeform project for Ancient Runes class. (He'd survived one class with Sybil Trelawney before he went to McGonagall and asked to take Runes instead; the first class hadn't happened yet so there was no problem at all.)

He ripped the four rune blocks from his neck and threw them on the ground. He felt himself wobble a bit on his feet from the close proximity of the dementors, then he managed to pull out his wand, jab it in the air, and call out, “res naturus facticiusque potestam purum invictumque fieri.”

The sudden magical drain felt like his every cell was shrinking, like the very life force was departing him. A golden shield, irregular in shape rather than an even, smooth dome, sprung into existence. The covered area wasn't large, but the shield was darker in color than he'd been led to believe by the Grimoire.

When a Dementor, aiming to Kiss Sirius Black, slammed into the ward, it disappeared and the ward flashed a deeper gold. The ward also expanded outward a few inches in each direction.

Harry barely noticed it before he swayed, from the Dementors and the expenditure of so much energy. He collapsed unconscious on top of his godfather's legs.

When Harry awoke, the golden dome was brighter and thicker and its outer boundary was even further out from Harry and his still unconscious godfather.

There were a number of people surrounding the golden dome, the Minister of Magic, the Hogwarts Headmaster, several red-cloaked wizards and witches, and two Dementors.

“You, young man.” That was Cornelius Fudge. “Potter. Potter, you're in this...this thingie with a dangerous convict. You've got to tell us how to get you out of there....”

As not even sound could penetrate the ward, Harry didn't hear a bit of this. But he saw the idiotic Minister turning colors, pointing at his godfather, and generally behaving like a cartoon character from a Warner Brothers episode.

It wasn't hard to guess what the dumpy little politician wanted. Harry looked at Albus Dumbledore who had a blank expression on his face.

Then he looked at the two Dementors. Then he looked back at the incensed Minister of Magic.

“No.” He knew they couldn’t hear him, but the single syllable should be clear enough.

That was all he said before he pushed himself off the ground and stood up. He didn’t rise to chest level on any of the Aurors, but his single word had them all riveted on him.

“What?”

“Harry,” the Headmaster said. “You need to get away....”

All of them began to speak at once, but Harry couldn’t read lips. He didn’t even try.

He rifled through his pockets and discovered a tattered bitch of parchment and a mostly crushed quill. There was still some ink in it. He knew he hadn’t stuffed it in his pants...oh, right, he’d cleaned up after Ron in the Common Room. Dirty young man.

Harry wrote, “This man is Sirius Black, my godfather. He did not harm my parents. In fact, I met the little rat who did. Peter Pettigrew is alive....”

Harry held up his message.

“Daft,” Fudge said. “You’ve been brained, what with all this nonsense.”

Harry couldn’t hear the words, but the body language was clear enough.

He wrote again, a bit smaller to conserve space. “The man who betrayed my parents is an animagus – an unregistered one – who takes the form of a rat. He spent the last decade hiding out in his rat form to avoid paying for what he did....”

“Harry,” the Headmaster said, “that’s all well and good. But we should discuss this back in the castle, alright?”

The Headmaster pointed back toward the castle.

Harry shook his head. “No. I’m not leaving here until I have this all worked out with you,” he said, not caring they wouldn’t hear his words.

“That man, Black there, will be Kissed as soon as we get our hands on him.” The Minister waved forward the two Dementors.

Harry became so enraged that his magic did something unexpected. Instead of blowing up the Minister, as he had his Aunt Marge, the golden dome rippled and two massive portions blew outward, impacting the two Dementors, dissolving them back into their constituent energy. Then whole structure glowed even deeper gold and pushed outward several more inches. Then the two ‘arms’ contracted back into the dome.

The Dementors were gone.

The Aurors had drawn wands.

The Minister had a terribly pale, pasty looking face. After all, the Dementors had stood to either side of him. “Those were the only two that would remain...that dome is why the others left...and why we’re missing twenty of the blasted creatures.” He was in shock and muttering to himself.

The Headmaster looked most concerned. He obviously had never seen a piece of magic like this.

Nor had Harry...but this ward responded differently from how the Grimoire described it. It almost seemed like it responded to emotion. Perhaps being powered partially by the destruction of creatures that fed on emotions had changed what it could do. Harry made a note to think on this some more...and to write all this down in the Grimoire some day.

"I'm sorry about that," Harry said. "My emotions...well, I didn't know this thing reacted like that." He remembered that they couldn't hear him. He began writing, "There will be no Kissing of my godfather. He had no trial, he's never been convicted of anything...."

"He's been at Azkaban for years," Fudge said. "He must have had a trial!"

"Show me the transcript," Harry wrote. "I want to read it."

Fudge turned to an Auror and, with a grimace, nodded at him. The man promptly disappeared from the area.

"You're going to be in a lot of trouble for this, Potter," the Minister said. "The Dementors were...are allies of the Ministry. And we can't have you going around killing them. What if they rebel? What if they attack us in retaliation? What will people think if our prisoners aren't guarded by Dementors, eh? Ever think about that?"

Harry said nothing and didn't bother writing a response to whatever angry diatribe he'd just received. He stood as tall as he could and waited. Didn't these people realize he couldn't hear them? Idiot wizards.

The Headmaster started in again, but Harry didn't even bother to look at the old wizard. He wasn't leaving this dome until he set things right. He had a slight position of power right now...but none once he released the ward.

He did not know how long he'd been in here or how much oxygen remained...but he would rather die with his godfather, now that he was restored to Harry, than let the man be Kissed for something he didn't do.

The Auror returned. He had nothing in his hands: no documents of any sort. The man walked over and began whispering in the Minister's ear. The short politician became even whiter. His skin began to glisten with sweat visible in the artificial light cast by several of the Aurors.

Eventually Fudge looked to Harry. "Fine, he gets a trial."

Even Dumbledore looked surprised at that statement. Fudge rarely backed down, no matter how wrong-headed his position was.

"Swear it...on your magic," Harry wrote. He'd had to use the inverse side of the parchment. He had little space left to conduct this negotiation.

"Well, I never," the Minister said. "I've given you my word, as Minister."

Harry saw that the man hadn't used his wand. "Commit your magic to ensuring my godfather gets to his trial alive, healthy, and with his soul intact. Swear it!" His small, sloppy handwriting became larger and ragged with his anger.

"Harry, you can't ask such things of the Minister of Magic," the Headmaster calmly stated.

"He tried to kill a man who'd never been tried," Harry wrote. "He sent Hagrid to prison last year just because he could. I want an oath."

"I have given my word. Potter, let's get moving." Fudge was trying not to commit to anything but an easily violated promise.

Dumbledore walked over and began to whisper in the Minister's ear. The politician then looked at his red-cloaked Aurors and all of them looked flummoxed, too. Eventually he nodded and drew out his wand. "I, Cornelius Fudge, do swear that Sirius Black will be healthy and alive at the trial I will arrange for him...."

"No," Harry said. He'd been reading lips this time. He sat back down and wrote a bit more on his parchment. "You are swearing, but you are not risking anything. Swear on your magic...or on your life!"

Fudge looked incensed but said nothing. Instead, he looked at Dumbledore again. The Headmaster nodded.

“I, Cornelius Fudge, do swear on my magic to protect Sirius Black and deliver him, healthy and alive, to the trial I will arrange for him before the Wizengamot.”

A pulse of light from his wand sealed the oath. A few moments later, Harry released the ward.

“I will sit with my godfather every moment until his trial,” Harry said.

A disgruntled look crossed Fudge’s face before he nodded. The man had obviously planned to delay Sirius’ trial for some time. Having the Boy-Who-Lived tied up in all this...well, it limited the Minister’s options.

The Aurors rushed the space trying to capture Sirius Black. Harry’s godfather was still passed out from the near desouling he’d received from a Dementor, so he wasn’t much of a threat. The Minister had only a moment before he barked out a command, “Stop.”

He didn’t want an overzealous Auror costing him his magic.

“Dumbledore, will you make us a portkey for Courtroom Number Ten? I’ll work on getting a quorum of members there overnight. I don’t want this blasted oath hanging over my head very long....”

Harry smiled at that admission. He accepted the enchanted pebble from the Headmaster and listened carefully when the old school teacher told him how to use it. Harry lifted his godfather’s hand so that it touched the pebble Harry held in the palm of his left hand. He said, “Justice,” and the device activated.

Harry arrived inside ‘Courtroom Number Ten,’ fell on his butt and felt a bit nauseous, but had no idea where he really was. He realized he was really very poorly educated about the world he lived in. This place was new; a portkey was new.

He turned to check on his godfather and found that Sirius was beginning to come awake. Apparently the rather violent portkey had been enough to wake someone out of a Dementor-induced shock.

“Harry?” the haggard man croaked.

“Yes.”

“Did they catch me?”

“Sort of. You’re going to get a trial....”

“Really?”

Harry nodded.

The disheveled former convict stared off into space and remained quiet for a long while. Eventually he said, “thank you.”

Harry said nothing. He was tired. His body was still tired from the massive amount of magic he’d channeled just a few hours earlier.

But he refused to sleep or let down his guard.

He didn’t know how long it was until people began entering the room. Some of them were dressed in gaudy maroon robes. Some of them were yawning and still in their pajamas.

Those people eventually stumbled into a side chamber and reemerged wearing the maroon robes everyone else did.

A few people stared at Harry and the unmoving Sirius Black. Harry’s godfather was trying to process what was about to happen. Harry kept a hand on the man’s shoulder, a protective gesture.

Slowly the number of groups of gossiping maroon-wearing witches and wizards grew. Eventually Fudge stumbled into the room in his suit, disappeared into the anteroom, and reemerged in maroon robes. Dumbledore followed him in, already enrobed.

At that, the gossiping witches and wizards began to seat themselves. All of them began to stare at Harry, now that it was the proper thing to do.

Fudge and Dumbledore were the last ones to take their seats. Then Dumbledore took an old stone and knocked it on the wooden railing. "This session of the Wizengamot is called to order. We have been called by our Minister to adjudicate the case of Sirius Black versus the Ministry of Magic...."

That finally got some murmuring going on. They had seen Sirius Black sitting on the stone floor, but until Dumbledore told everyone his name, no one reacted much at all. Harry was not impressed.

"Point of order," one old man said, "Sirius Black has already been convicted by this Court...."

Dumbledore shook his head. "I'm afraid your memory is incorrect, Lord Porridge. No record exists of his trial and we have no pensieve memory available in the Hall of Memories."

The old man pursed his lips and sat silently.

"Now, Sirius Black is accused of conspiring with the terrorist known as Voldemort...." This got Dumbledore a number of flinches and a few hisses of protest. He continued speaking. "He is also accused of killing a number of Muggles and the wizard known as Peter Pettigrew. Minister Fudge has asked to personally administer the veritaserum."

Sirius stood up from the floor. He refused to sit in the hideous chair complete with chains. The Minister had to stand on the tips of his toes in order to feed Sirius three drops of the truth serum. He did it himself to ensure Sirius received a true potion rather than a clear poison. Aurors had been known to take things into their own hands from time to time.

Fudge returned to his seat before Dumbledore began the questioning. "State your name."

"Sirius Black."

"On what date did you become a Death Eater?"

“I never did.”

That got a reaction. Some tried to call out that he was fighting the truth serum, but Dumbledore waved them down. “Contrary to what some gossip rags like to play up, no one has ever beaten veritaserum. Why...I suppose I could get some most interesting stories out you, Lord Stebbins, right?”

The man was a notorious philanderer. He blushed a bit and shut up.

“You were sent to Azkaban for being a Death Eater, for killing Muggles, and for killing your friend Peter Pettigrew. Do you deny these charges?”

“I do.”

Dumbledore waved his hand again to silence his colleagues on the court. “Tell us, please, how the Potters came to die on Halloween 1981.”

“My dear friends James and Lily had been urged into hiding in early 1981. They did not tell me precisely why. For months they changed from safehouse to safehouse, but Death Eaters used various magical means to track them. They had a young child with them and the danger and the stress was running them ragged. Lily stumbled across an arcane, almost disused spell called the Fidelius Charm, which permitted the hiding of a secret within the soul of a person. When they took up residence at Godric’s Hollow, we let it slip that I was their protector...but we actually entrusted the secret to Peter Pettigrew.”

“You claim, then, that this Peter Pettigrew betrayed the Potters and was a Death Eater or sympathizer?”

“Yes.”

Dumbledore sat stumped for a few moments before he resumed his questioning. “Why did it appear that you had killed this wizard, then?”

“A few hours after my friends were killed, I caught up to Peter on a Muggle street. He screamed at me, ‘why had I done this’ before he used a silent curse to blow up a part of the street. He got more than he expected as he hit some kind of gas line. He transformed into his animagus form and disappeared. I stood there, laughing at the preposterousness of it all. The weak little Peter had gotten one over me; had finally learned a silent curse; had gotten lucky with his wanton destruction.”

Dumbledore stared a few moments straight into Sirius’ eyes. “Why didn’t you explain this then?”

“My mind was fractured, I suppose. Fudge was there that day, then Barty Crouch showed up. They didn’t ask me a single question. I was in Azkaban within the hour. No one ever came to interrogate me or set up a trial; no one, save the Dementors, came around on a regular basis; no one save for Bagnold and then Fudge even bothered to taunt me and they only did it as part of their annual inspections.”

Dumbledore sighed and then looked at his fellow jurists. “Are there any questions from the panel?”

Heads shook no. They were beginning to understand the horror of what had happened...what could have happened to any of them. Black, right now, should have been a member of the Wizengamot after his mother’s passing. He was...just like one of them, save for his twelve years in Azkaban. An innocent among the Dementors. More than one had shivers running down her spine.

Dumbledore brought the stone down twice. “The Court finds no grounds to hold a formal trial. Sirius Black is cleared of these accusations....”

Harry Potter pushed himself forward again. “I wish to hear from Minister Fudge and this Crouch person...and even you, Headmaster. Under veritaserum. Why did this happen?”

That got a round of applause. Even Dumbledore turned a bit pasty. A stern, elegant witch grabbed the stone from Dumbledore’s hand. “I will handle this from here, Chief Warlock.”

“Very well, Chief Witch Brockwell.”

Dumbledore stood down and dragged Fudge with him. The Chief Witch summoned a few Aurors to her for some instructions and then they left the Courtroom.

It was well past dawn before Harry and his newly freed godfather left the Ministry of Magic. Sirius had a formal apology. Fudge had been forced to stand down as Minister and a large portion of his wealth was used as compensation for Sirius. Barty Crouch had been found with his supposedly dead son, Barty Jr. In a fit of pique, for a true Death Eater escaping from Azkaban while an innocent languished there, both Crouches were sentenced to death. The estate was dissolved and the bulk given to Sirius as further compensation.

Even Dumbledore took a hit. For not forcing a trial or even interviewing a detained suspect, he was removed from his role as Chief Warlock. He maintained his seat on the court, but was informally advised to skip the next dozen sessions or so.

Harry left the building with a few new admirers and more than a few newly vehement enemies. Some detractors had even proposed charging Harry for destroying more than twenty Dementors.

The Chief Witch, tongue firmly in cheek, smiled and asked, “Which law did Mr. Potter break?”

No one had ever conceived of the possibility of destroying a Dementor. The Wizengamot had never made it a crime to attack or harm them. In any case, the self defense clauses would cover most of the destruction.

The angered witches and one wizard finally conceded defeat.

At the moment Harry didn't care. He had had a vision of a life without the Dursleys; a vision that was yanked away with Pettigrew's escape. Then, a turn of luck and a spine of steel had allowed Harry to reclaim the vision, to make it a reality.

As the pair hit street level, Sirius asked, "I'm not complaining, but why did you do that, Harry?"

"A Potter does his duty, even if it might cost him his life."

Sirius nodded. All the Potters Sirius had ever known – James, the patriarch Harold, James' uncle Winston, even James' mother, Katherine – behaved this way and believed in duty overriding all other concerns.

Sirius let a tear fall, then recovered himself and hailed a cab. He asked to be taken to Charing Cross Road. He was silent with his thoughts while they traveled. He was a bit embarrassed he couldn't bring himself to speak, even after this great service to him. But...it was overwhelming, freedom, knowing Harry, seeing Crouch reduced to less than an Azkaban convict.

All of this fed into his deeply bred sense of vengeance. The Blacks did not let crimes against them go unanswered. It was a point of shame, actually; it explained why he had abandoned Harry that night to go off chasing Pettigrew. The Black Blood...a curse that never relented.

He thought to the future. Gringotts. He needed money if he was going to be able to rehabilitate himself in the coming weeks and months. A private healer. A course of potions and treatments. Getting a home arranged fit for Harry to live in starting in just a few days.

Harry let his godfather dwell on his thoughts. He was just too happy to do anything else. He accompanied Sirius as far as the Leaky Cauldron, where he used the Floo to travel to Hogsmeade. He had a tremendous smile on his face when he walked back to Hogwarts from there. His future...it seemed so open, so bright.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

XVII DECEM MCDXXII

VENEFICIUS: HUMUS VIVUS

The Living Earth augments and refines the poor clay we have available into the rough-out of the pot or sculpture our commission calls for. Imperfection, improper mixing, and plant and insect matter vanish as a result of this spell.

One holds his focus with his first two fingers and thumb and dips it toward the earth or clay to be molded while performing the incantation. A clear conception in mind will shape the clay into the desired form.

Drying and heating spells may then be applied before the fine detail work is performed. A completed model may then be used with the Stonework Spell or the Bronze Forge spell to complete the commission should the end product not be made of clay.

No artisan may work on commissions for the family until he has mastered this spell, by order of the Domus of the Family.

ALBERTUS IACOBUS
DOMUS FAMILIUS

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

Sirius Black extinguished the fire outside the tent he and his godson were sharing. Ireland had won the World Cup so everyone was deep in their cups tonight.

He turned to head inside the space-enlarged tent when he heard something. He turned back...and saw something that sent chills down his spine.

There were people twirling in mid-air. It felt similar to an attack in Hogsmeade back in 1979, when the Death Eaters were out for a few minutes showing their power and their immunity from opposition. No one could stop them; few tried and were cursed for their troubles.

Sirius didn't know what to do. Run inside and secure Harry...or run to help.

Harry. Harry came first, damn his Black Blood.

Sirius ran into the tent to rouse a sleeping Harry. It only took a few moments to get the young man up and moving, but by the time Sirius and Harry exited the tent, the marching Death Eaters were almost on top of their position.

One of the masked terrorists saw Sirius and begins to cast at him. Sirius handles that man, but doesn't see another begin to cast.

Harry does. He incants an unfamiliar spell, while almost limply drawing his wand down. Sirius stuns his opponent...then he notices what's happened to the second man. The ground underneath the masked coward's feet begins sliding up the wizard, trapping him and immobilizing him. All around him, the earth begins to ripple and climb the masked terrorists.

A few acted quickly enough to apparate away.

Most of them were trapped.

Sirius stunned all of them for good measure.

Sirius took a breath and turned to Harry. "What was that you cast? Living Earth, never heard of it."

Harry smiled, but said nothing. The boy could be an enigma when he wanted. Sirius was considering whining to annoy his godson into coughing over the information when the Aurors finally arrived. They looked nearly as terrified as the Muggles who had just been twirling in midair. Several of the red-cloaked protectors began shooting off stunners wildly. One of them nearly tagged Harry.

Sirius and Harry both drew down on the Aurors.

"Hold your spellfire, you morons...."

Amos Diggory, who wasn't an Auror or even very good with a wand, stepped forward once he saw what had happened. "Hold on there, Black. Just a mistake. Lot of spellfire came from here just now...."

“That was me, stunning these Death Eaters or wannabees.”

The Aurors finally noticed that odd, stunned black robed men around the perimeter of this camp.

“How are they still standing up?” a tall, black Auror asked.

“My godson used a rather interesting spell to immobilize them....”

The Auror sighed. He looked like he was gearing up to make an underage magic speech.

“I don’t want to hear it,” Harry said. “I protected my godfather from being cursed. That qualifies as self defense.”

The Auror closed his mouth and nodded. The other Aurors remembered the golden dome many of them had seen this child inside of – and what that dome had done to some Dementors when the boy was angry. They kept their comments to themselves. Laws were laws; but true power was a law unto itself in the magical world.

The Aurors murmured to each other before one of them had the bright idea to unmask a few of these Death Eaters. Lo and behold, Lucius Malfoy, Confidence Greengrass, Heinrich Bole, and Terwilliger Parkinson, along with several other Wizengamot members and ‘advisors,’ were among the Death Eaters.

The Aurors looked like they’d sucked down bitter lemons. Fudge and many of his cronies were out of power...but that didn’t mean these wealthy idiots didn’t still have friends and favors to call in.

The tall, black Auror slapped a portkey onto Lucius Malfoy and then touched it with his wand. The portkey sparked and disappeared, but Malfoy remained behind.

“Interesting,” Harry said. He’d never suspected the Living Earth would disrupt the magic of a portkey. He wondered what else it might do. He needed to make some more notes in the Grimoire.

“Can you dispel this...whatever it is?”

Harry nodded. He raised his wand and mumbled an incantation. The earth fell away from Lucius Malfoy and the man tipped forward, face first, onto the hard dirt.

The tall, black Auror slapped another portkey on the Death Eater. This time Lucius Malfoy disappeared.

“The rest of them?”

“One at a time. I’d rather they didn’t get away,” Harry said.

The Aurors scowled a bit before spreading out near to each of the immobilized Death Eaters. Harry pointed at each once.

The Death Eaters popped away to a supposedly secure prison, a place none of these wealthy elites expected to visit this evening. The Aurors were slower in departing after the Death Eaters were secured. They wanted information, especially what spell Harry had used to immobilize the Death Eaters and render them untransportable.

“It’s a family secret,” was all Harry would say. That had Sirius puzzled. James had never mentioned knowing any of his family secrets or having access to the family magics. How had Harry come across them? He’d have to ask once they were away from so many inquisitive eavesdroppers.

Finally the Aurors departed. Harry wanted to just go back to sleep, but Sirius insisted they pack up and return to the small house he’d rented outside Cardiff. The pair had to continue house shopping the next day...and Sirius didn’t feel completely safe in an area where Death Eaters had just attacked – and where some of them had escaped from.

Harry settled into his bed and went straight back asleep, clearly exhausted.

Sirius found he couldn’t fall back asleep. The night’s events...brought up buried demons. He limited himself to a single glass of FireWhiskey and did not come to any new conclusions.

Most of his mental conversation revolved around whether he'd need to take Harry and leave Britain behind.

He'd abandoned his godson once. Now...now, he had advanced warning that the Death Eaters were marching again. He wasn't a young punk with no responsibilities in the world; he couldn't just throw himself into battle with no thought toward future consequences. He finally had a role in his godson's life...and he needed to protect the young man as best as he could.

He set down the empty tumbler and his eyes stared into the dying embers in the fireplace. Dawn crested through the window long before sleep deigned to visit Sirius Black that morning.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

"Harry Potter," the Headmaster's urgent voice called out in the darkened Great Hall. Harry's forehead slumped to the hard surface of the table. He raised his head up and thumped it down again. He tried to wake himself from whatever bad dream was currently troubling him.

Of course, he was already awake. It was his variety of luck, not a nightmare, plaguing him. If something bad could happen...it could and would happen to him. It was Halloween so something bad had to happen.

Harry's name had just been called out as the fourth contestant – underage at that – in a three-person tournament between three magical schools. Students from three schools and teachers and dignitaries from three countries all had sour or angry expressions on their faces as they looked at Harry in the darkened hall.

He could feel their stares, every one of them accusing him, trying and sentencing him, wishing to curse him and denounce him.

"I did not ask for this," he said in a quiet, frustrated voice.

Ron looked furious. Hermione looked baffled and a bit nervous. Harry stood up and began to walk to the front of the Great Hall.

When he arrived, Dumbledore tried to get him off the dais and into an anteroom. Harry didn't want to move. "This artifact has been tampered with. I did not enter my name into this Goblet. What are you going to do about it?"

"Let us discuss that presently, Mr. Potter."

"No. I want you to tell these people that I did not enter this contest. I do not want to be a part of it."

Dumbledore blinked a few times and then turned. "Harry's quite right. It appears that I should clarify a few things. Someone has tampered with the centuries-old Goblet of Fire. I will investigate how this happened and who did it. In the meantime, it may mean that Mr. Potter will have to participate."

"He cheated," someone called out.

Dumbledore shook his head. "I do not think any student in this school has the experience or fine magical control necessary to confound a six hundred year old magical artifact. I could be wrong...but I do not think Mr. Potter did this."

It wasn't a glittering statement of innocence from the Headmaster, but Harry was stuck with it. The old man was too cagey with his words. Indeed, it seems as if some of his legalisms were designed to make Harry seem more guilty than if Dumbledore had said nothing. 'I do not think Mr. Potter did this' was a rather weak way to state that the only people capable of this action were the professors of Hogwarts or the visitors they were hosting right now.

Harry let Dumbledore push him along into the anteroom. He sat down on a stone stair and did not speak, even when the three academy heads began to tear into each other.

Had the circumstances been different, Harry might have enjoyed people batting around claims of Dumbledore's lack of competence. After all, Sirius had rotted in Azkaban for twelve years and Harry had rotted in Little Whinging because of the inaction of this man.

Eventually the room grew quiet and Harry could feel eyes on him. He looked up. They were waiting for him to do...or say something.

“What are my options?”

Dumbledore looked to one of the Ministry men, the one who looked like a ridiculous, overweight Oliver Wood. Harry remembered him from the World Cup. He'd played as a Beater for a long time before going into government. Since then he'd obviously let himself go to pot.

“There are two options. Um, well, Old Barty explained it all to me...before he came to his bad end. Harry here can compete or he can pay the forfeit.”

“And what does the forfeit cost?” Harry asked.

“The Goblet has only ever taken three forfeits. I found this an interesting story, but Barty made it sound so serious, so boring. The interesting thing is each time the Goblet took something different. From a powerful magician, it took a majority of the wizard's power. From a cunning witch, it robbed her of her ability to speak. From a young wizard who wished to back out of the 1513 Triwizard Tournament...it took nothing.”

The man had a sense for drama, if nothing else. Harry sighed and rested his forehead on the knees for a moment. Then he stood up and looked Dumbledore in the eye.

“I want to know how this happened....”

“Little, arrogant upstart.” That was Severus Snape, who for some reason had invited himself into this mess, along with McGonagall and the new, rather horrifying looking Defense teacher, Moody.

“Professor Snape, if you ever talk to me again like that, I will ask the Wizengamot to investigate your conduct after you were paroled to Dumbledore here. The Headmaster has quite a black mark on his record. Care to imagine what they might do to you...considering your 'skill' as a teacher of their children and grandchildren?”

Snape's eyes widened and his mouth shut.

Dumbledore looked sad. "Harry, enough anger already exists in this room. Let us all try to be calm."

"Let us all try to find out what happened. I did not ask for this. I think the tournament is a fine idea and I'm completely happy with Cedric representing us. I do not want to be a distraction...."

That got Fleur Delacoeur slandering Harry while Cedric Diggory and Viktor Krum looked on impassively.

Eventually Harry had enough...of all of it. "I will ask my guardian to come and deal with all of this tomorrow. He recently took over his seat on the Wizengamot. I'd expect a full investigation by the government...unless you figure out a solution to this mess."

Harry walked out of the room and into an empty Great Hall, ignoring the teachers who continued to call after him.

This wasn't a mess of his own invention. He'd ask for help – unlike his previous practice. He'd fight this every step of the way. Then he'd make all of these fools pay dearly, especially the one who had messed with the Goblet of Fire.

When Harry got into the Gryffindor Common Room, only Hermione seemed glad to see him. Even after what Dumbledore said – or perhaps because of what and how Dumbledore said it – his fellow classmates had taken a dim view of this whole mess.

Hermione, however, dragged him over to a seat near the fireplace.

"What did they say?"

"Nothing yet. They were still arguing and sniping at each other."

"So...."

Harry shrugged. "I'm going to get in touch with Sirius. I'll let him work some of his 'charm' on these...honorable educators."

Hermione snickered. She admired Harry's wicked sense of humor whenever it did manage to peak out and say hello.

"Ron's being...well, he speaks first and then engages his brain a few days later."

"What did he say?" Harry asked.

"Let's just I showed Ron tonight what I did to Malfoy last year when he was gloating about Buckbeak getting killed."

Harry remembered the slap and the look on Malfoy's face afterwards. "That bad, huh? Remind me not to make you angry."

"There's angry...and then there's what Ron's comments made me feel. Just stay away from that," Hermione said.

"Right. Where'd he go?"

"To the dorms."

"Great," Harry said. "I need to get something from up there."

"You want me to...."

"No," Harry said. "If I can't face a little bit of sniping, I'll never get anywhere in this world. Thanks for...understanding."

"I don't think you did this...or even could do this. Ron didn't seem to believe the Headmaster."

Harry shrugged. "Nor did a lot of other people, it seems."

"Well, he wasn't exactly airtight in his defense."

"Story of my life at Hogwarts I guess. Sit tight, I'll try to come back down, without hexing anyone."

“Just don’t let a prefect see you, if you need to.”

“Normally ours are useless, but because of what happened tonight they might just pay attention if I did do something bad. A whole bunch of Percy Weasleys, power mad pencil pushers.”

Hermione laughed and returned to whatever thick book she had on her lap.

Harry stood up and walked to the stairs. He needed to tell Sirius...and stay out of trouble.

Harry took a stoic view of the situation. For every good, he got a bad. He’d gone to live with Sirius, so now of course he had this Tournament mess happen. He’d get it solved, then something else would happen.

That was the pattern of his life.

Harry took a deep breath and then pushed open the door to the space he shared with Dean, Seamus, Neville, and Ron. The silence from three of the people in there spoke volumes. Neville said a shy, quiet “hello.”

It was going to be a long school year.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

Sirius Black walked up the path from Hogsmeade to Hogwarts on November 1. He had had twelve hours to get terribly angry, a lot drunk. He’d only had a bit of time to calm down and then sober up.

His devious prankster’s mind – which could easily take a good joke too far, he knew – was already crafting evil things for Karkaroff, Snape, Dumbledore, even Ludo Bagman.

He remembered back to that sleepless night after the World Cup, when he wondered if he should just disappear with Harry. The answer should have been yes. This disaster just proved it.

Sirius breathed in deeply of the fresh, light air. He began to walk a bit faster. Hogwarts in the gentle morning looked imposing and beautiful.

He was going to bring a bit of verbal violence to spoil things this morning.

He walked through the outer gate at the edge of the grounds. He saw Hagrid tending to a patch of pumpkins. The large man waved and Sirius returned it.

The castle still seemed asleep, but Sirius knew that Dumbledore was waiting.... The man might come across as a bit loopy, but not much passed him by. If Harry was mixed up in a mess, then Dumbledore knew far more about it than he chose to admit.

Sirius arrived at the castle proper. He could see the bright robes of Dumbledore in the entry way.

Sirius' arrival had been noted, then. By the wards? Or did Dumbledore have other effective spies on the grounds?

"Lord Black," the Headmaster said. His wide arms seemed welcoming, but Sirius knew he wasn't welcome this morning.

"Headmaster."

"Walk with me and Mr. Bagman outside, would you?"

"A pleasure."

Sirius saw a nervous Ministry department head pop out of the shadows and join the group. Ludo Bagman, a waste of a wizard's life. A degenerate gambler; a leaking sieve passing information, unknowingly, to Death Eaters; a Ministry official who couldn't do his job even with five or twelve brilliant assistants doing all the heavy lifting; a man unable to set foot into Gringotts for fear that one of the syndicates he owed money to would catch up with him.

Sirius nodded at the man, but did not speak to him or offer to shake hands.

“Mr. Potter seemed quite upset,” Dumbledore began once the three of them were well away from potential eavesdroppers.

“I am quite upset. The illusion you project of strong security at this school...I don't know how you get away with it.”

Dumbledore tipped his head, but said nothing.

Bagman walked a bit faster to keep equal with the other two. “What are you here to do, Black?”

“I want to find out what happened, what your investigation has revealed – and then I want to broker a compromise.”

Bagman began to speak, but Dumbledore cut him off. The Ministry official obviously liked the fact that Potter was involved; it'd bring a lot of attention to what could have been a lackluster competition.

The Headmaster picked up the conversation. “I investigated the Goblet of Fire. The original instructions – to evaluate the magical capabilities of the volunteers from three schools and to pick a single strong representative from each – were overwhelmed later. A fourth school was added to the Goblet and apparently only one name was hard coded for consideration....”

“So...someone with access, someone with some skill with a wand?”

Dumbledore nodded.

“Harry mentioned something about a magical contract settling into place. Have you verified this?”

Dumbledore sighed. “Yes, Harry has been bonded into the contract even though we know he didn't enter his name.”

“Anything else?”

Dumbledore shook his head.

“Bagman, what does the Ministry think of this?”

“We’re concerned that someone was able to tamper with a precious artifact. But...we think additional competition doesn’t hurt anything.”

“So...typical stick-it’s-head-in-the-sand. Sounds almost like Fudge is still Minister. I guess Hugo Blackwater isn’t such a different politician, is he?”

Bagman said nothing to that.

“Dumbledore, do you know the identity of this saboteur?”

“Alas, no. The Goblet seems to have...consumed any residual magical trace. It knows it’s supposed to select four contestants and it would do it again if we relit the Goblet of Fire....”

Sirius stopped walking. Dumbledore and Bagman progressed a few steps before they realized their companion was no longer with them. The Headmaster turned and looked at Sirius.

“Yes?”

“I’m done with the pleasantries, Albus. You’ve offered me nothing. Bagman here is drooling over Harry being in over his head; good publicity and all that. You, Headmaster, have made Harry seem even more guilty by offering your tepid assurance that he’s innocent. These games stop now.”

“I know you’re on the Wizengamot,” Bagman said, “but you have no authority to demand this.”

“You have two choices, Bagman. Figure a way out of this...or do nothing. If this isn’t solved in a reasonable time frame, well, I’ll hire Gringotts to fix it....”

“What can they do?” The Under-Minister for Sport seemed nonplussed.

"Their curse breakers can fix most any enchantment."

Dumbledore got a bit of a pale look on his face, "You mean break any enchantment."

"Fix. Break. It's all in the eye of the beholder."

"You can't," Bagman said. "It's an artifact of the Department of Mysteries...."

"...and has protections," Sirius said. "Funny how we have more protections for old goblets than we do for the innocent going to Azkaban, huh? I had my solicitor up overnight looking into this. This Goblet of Fire has been certified as being tampered with...and ensnaring an innocent in its charm. Dumbledore just said so. The law has no problem with me, Harry's guardian, arranging for that enchantment to be taken care of. I'd recommend calling the thing a draw and restarting it...without using the Goblet next time. Take...oh, an hour to make up your mind. The goblins won't be here until ten or so."

"Goblins!" Bagman almost screamed. "Here?"

Sirius smiled.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

18 September 1617

Votum: Fortuna Mala

Determination is all with this votum. The poor warlock fails in his casting for misintention and lack of conviction. The wish or desire to do harm must be present in both the caster and target.

The warlock points the focus at the target, but does not move it during the incanting.

The incantation vulno fortunam is all that is required. The votum cannot be ended by the caster. Only the emotion of the target regarding the caster can end the spell. Should the target lose his or her harmful thoughts, the votum ends.

I record this spell as it is a derivative of the encantatum we were recently commissioned to make. That encantatum affected a statue we crafted, giving bad luck to anyone who touched it. This votum works more directly.

I report that I have tested the votum on the deadbeat Greengrass Family head. His manor burnt down last night. Perhaps the man might remember to pay his bills for the statuary and necessities he commissions in the future. If he didn't consider me – and the family – enemies, the curse never would have stuck.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

The First Task came on a rather dreary day at the end of November. Harry Potter sat in the stands next to his godfather, Sirius Black, and his remaining solid friend Hermione Granger. Ron Weasley, a now weak friend, if that, sat well away with his brothers who kept trying to dump various substances down the back of his sweater.

Harry looked at the dragon in the corner of the stadium – the very large, rather upset dragon. He was glad that Dumbledore and Company had folded under Sirius' threats.

Instead of a four-man Triwizard Tournament, the four contenders played several rounds of Rock-Paper-Scissors. Krum won all three of his matches, making him the 'winner' of the tournament. Dumbledore gave him the small candy bowl he kept filled with lemon sherbets as a prize.

Now, Cedric, Viktor, and Fleur were competing without the compulsion of the Goblet of Fire...that blasted, easily confused artifact.

Harry was a spectator and loving it.

Hermione, on the other hand, looked bored. Her hand kept moving toward her bookbag and any one of several books 'for light reading' she had inside.

Sirius just sat and smiled. He really loved being out in crowds nowadays. Freedom suited him, as he did not hesitate to remind anyone several times a day.

"This seems like it can go wrong about ten ways from Sunday."

Harry scrunched up his face. "What does that mean?"

"Heard it on the telly. Sounded good."

Sirius had been exploring the Muggle world quite a bit lately. He loved the VCR and had a membership at a rental shoppe. Harry suspected Sirius frequented it for the dirty, little back room they had.

Of course, neither Harry nor Sirius mentioned to Hermione how they 'acquired' the electricity needed to run his non-magical devices. Sirius didn't think of it as stealing, per se, just as borrowing from his Muggle neighbors.

"That's a Welsh Green, I think," Hermione said.

"Hagrid told me, after he was in his cups, that there is also a Chinese Fireball and a Hungarian Horntail," Sirius said.

"Well, they're not cuddly, but the Green is a beautiful beast," Harry said. Sirius snickered at the 'cuddly' remark as he already knew the story of Hagrid's acquisition of a dragon and how he'd attempted to mother the small, but rapidly growing creature.

"Hagrid must have snuck off to see them every night since they arrived," Hermione said.

"That Headmistress from France has been making goo-goo eyes at him...but I think a dragon would interest him even more than...well, you know," Harry said.

Hermione had a scandalized look on her face, while Sirius just looked a bit ill at the thought of what two half-giants might do with each other in a small, confined space.

The conversation ended when the heavyset Ministry official, Bagman, began to officiate the First Task. "Good morning, gentle witches and wizards. Welcome to the First Task, a task of bravery in the face of uncertainty. Our first contestant, Mr. Diggory of Hogwarts, will now begin his task."

Nearly a minute later, a rather small person entered the floor of the arena. Or, rather, he was a normal sized person and the seats for the spectators were quite elevated above the arena. After all, dragons were among the most dangerous and persistent creatures in the magical world.

Cedric took his time advancing on the nesting mother and her eggs. One of them was obviously a fake, it was gold after all. But dragons were believed to be color blind.

To the dragon, it would appear that Cedric meant harm to her clutch.

Harry felt glad that he wasn't a part of this boondoggle. He reached over and rubbed his godfather's shoulder for a moment. The pain hummed in appreciation. More than a decade inside a revolting prison had left his body deteriorated in ways that couldn't easily be mended. His shoulders were the last hold outs. More than one healer swore up and down that all should be well again.

Still, the pain persisted.

Hermione looked down at Cedric, a rather...handsome Hufflepuff, and her desire to read her newest book, on the magic of the number seventeen, vanished. Her eyes followed his wand as he transfigured stone into living flesh, as he sent his transfigured canines off to distract and disorient the dragon, as he attempted to climb toward the pile of eggs and collect the golden one.

She admired his grace and his cunning.

She also had a bit of a palpitation when she realized that Cedric was well within range of the vengeful dragon if it managed to dispatch the transfigured dogs.

She wished he had thought to transfigure something to go and collect the golden egg.

She knew she had a touch of a crush on the handsome older boy...as she had once had a crush on the dashing Lockhart...but she kept her emotions tightly bound.

Of course, Sirius noticed. "So, uhh, Hermione, I understand you appreciate the charms of older men...."

"What!"

"You're screaming at me...and your eyes haven't moved off the speck of a boy down there...ohh, the dragon noticed him. Bad form."

Hermione blanched. Harry leaned forward in his seat. Sirius stopped joking. A blast of fire headed directly at Cedric, but the boy slashed his wand at it before he tried to duck behind a large stone.

The boy was burnt, badly, but he was alive. Whatever he had done with his wand had...redirected a portion of the flame elsewhere.

Harry's eyes moved away from the sluggish, pained form of Cedric Diggory. His eyes moved up and to the left, to where Dumbledore...sat.

The wizard was dressed not in robes, but in cinders. The frumpish man sitting next to him, the new Minister of Magic, had ripped off his cloak and was trying to jump on it to extinguish the flames. Apparently in times of stress the man forgot he was a wizard with a wand.

Harry's eyes flicked back and forth between Cedric and the judge's table. Dumbledore wasn't hurt, just angered and embarrassed. Cedric had fought through his pain, grabbed the golden egg, and managed

to make it a good long way before he fell down screaming. He got up again and limped as quickly as he could.

Up in his booth, Dumbledore had restored himself to a near pristine condition by the time Cedric left the competition arena. Very few would see what happened to the Headmaster, but it brought a smile to Harry's face.

He had cast a Bad Luck Curse against Dumbledore nearly two weeks ago. It had obviously stuck, meaning Dumbledore did not have Harry's best interests in mind. The man had been nearly crushed by a loose stone in the Great Hall, had been knocked over by a suit of armor in the hallway, had been doused in some kind of pus in a letter addressed to Hermione Granger but mistakenly delivered to him. Now...he had been toasted by a dragon.

While Sirius could appreciate the vicious nature of this 'prank,' Harry kept it to himself. He did not want to explain about the Grimoire, the source of his new found esoteric knowledge.

Harry clapped, politely, when Mr. Krum was announced ten minutes later. He watched the brutal, straight forward ploy the Bulgarian made. Very different from the gentle transfigurations used by Cedric.

He stopped paying attention when the dragon went a bit crazy and trampled over some of her eggs. The crushed yolks told him all he needed to know.

This sport was barbaric. A half dozen dragons had just perished because an incompetent wizard wanted to make the sport seem better.

Harry walked out of the stadium before Krum got his egg. A confused Sirius Black joined him a moment later.

"So?"

"It was senseless."

"I don't understand."

“I’m not as dragon crazy as Hagrid, but I respect them. That...boy in there just murdered a bunch of potential dragons. I won’t sit through the rest of this.”

Sirius shrugged, but continued following his godson. They were almost back to the castle before Hermione realized her friend and his annoying guardian were gone. Maybe the hormones were getting to her.

She’d just been staring at the little person down there like he was the last steak in the supermarket.

She’d be happier if she could just return to her books. Boys...were so...difficult.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

In the 814th year since Merlin’s passing
7 December 1702

The Memoria Enchantment, Variation 31

This spell varies from its forbearers in that it is not a component of a ritual, but is intended and designed to be used by one wizard unilaterally against another.

I developed this variation in the middle of a terrible year for the Potter Family. The Wizengamot, the ridiculous antiquarian name for the Wizard Council, has pushed far beyond the bounds of any propriety.

Indeed, because of a master’s thesis submitted to the Wizengamot Library, my youngest brother, Hereford, has been banished from the realm. He delved too deeply, and spoke too honestly, about the creatures he has studied for the last six years.

The Memoria Variation was designed to ensure that none of these worthless cutthroats I share the Wizengamot Chamber with will ever remember to attempt enforcement of their banishment.

I have arranged for Hereford's thesis to be published in Paris. I believe many will be interested in his findings on the cursed and fabricated magical creatures. I myself had not realized it was impossible to use a vampire's blood or a house elf's skin or even a manticores' venom in a potion or ritual. My brother's argument is that the curse present in vampires, werewolves, even house elves destroys any beneficial properties of the potion. Likewise, the components of an artificial creature, such as a chimera, have no magical potential outside of the whole as a result of how they were created.

The problem with his thesis goes back to the revelations about house elves being cursed. Grouping together the servant class with werewolves and vampires earned my brother immediate enemies. None like to think at all, positively or negatively, of their house elves. This thesis, once discovered by an old codger many months after its submission, forced those who learned of it to reconsider the curse. Forcing the elves to work reinforced the curse, continued it. If we let the magic work its will without interference, my brother's work suggests that the curse will either end or the cursed will die out entirely.

All of the options are bad, but continued decades and centuries of this curse are far worse than the short-term unpleasantness of getting this all over with now.

Of course, the court disagreed with me. They approve more experiments on muggles in order to perfect memory charms...but refuse to end our support of a curse on a sentient race. Should anyone be surprised that the Muggles had to expand Bethlehem Hospital – Bedlam – to hold all the apparently insane lunatics, those are actually the failures of various memory charm experiments. Magic is not designed to work gently on muggles. The cost of this experimentation is more than we should be comfortable paying.

Anyway, Variation 31. The incantation is *oublier*, from the French root for 'to forget.' The wand is held pointed at the forehead of the target and a swish is added once the incantation has been performed.

The Potter Family Council debated for many hours before deciding to include this variation in our Book. Power of this type is a dangerous thing, but unchecked idiocy and corruption is even more dangerous. Heirs, use this power well. Be cautious, yet firm in the face of the corrupted and the evil banal.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

Harry looked around for Hermione. The closer the Second Task came to starting, the more upset he began to feel. He didn't have any romantic inclinations toward his friend. No, after what he helped her with in January, he definitely felt protective, brotherly feelings toward her.

"Calm down," Sirius said. "She's probably decided to sit this event out...after what happened."

"Krum," Harry said.

He'd been ready to declare a blood feud between the Potter family and the Krums of Bulgaria, but Sirius stayed his hand. Harry was underage and Hermione, the injured party, wasn't under the protection of the Potters at the time. There was no permissible reason for Harry to duel the Quidditch phenom, let alone to attempt a castration hex.

Sirius rubbed Harry's shoulder and the young wizard began to breathe more calmly. Eventually the Ministry fool, Bagman, started the event and Diggory, Krum, and Delacoeur jumped into the lake in the middle of February. Foolish magicals, Harry thought.

It was a particularly boring event to watch. Where the dragon had been quite fascinating, save for Krum's butchery, this event was as exciting as watching water evaporate. There was nothing to see.

This was obviously Dumbledore's work. An intensely brilliant challenge that's deadly boring for the spectators – trying to drum up some kind of international excitement for England in a potential time of need by stultifying dignitaries and reporters and opinion makers. Brilliant and stunningly idiotic at the same time.

Harry and Sirius passed the time by discussing how their summer plans were shaping up. Harry wanted to visit Godric's Hollow. Sirius was all for it, with more than a touch of sadness in his face. He then suggested to Harry that they visit the ancestral Potter Lands and see what remained of the Manor House. It had burned decades earlier, likely sparked by Death Eaters, but the house could be rebuilt.

Harry smiled. Sirius told Harry what he remembered when he'd visited the place so long ago. Images of a new house, created out of brilliant white stone, began to form in Harry's mind.

The conversation ended, forty minutes after people jumped into the water, when Fleur popped out of the water. In tears.

She had bloody gashes on her arms and legs.

Someone covered her in a blanket and tried to calm her down.

Ten minutes later, Diggory emerged from the lake...with his girlfriend, Cho. Harry definitely...appreciated how the Asian-Anglican girl looked. But...he didn't feel much jealousy. Not now, not after her life had been risked for a stupid tournament and then saved by Diggory. The boy had gone to great lengths for her and he hoped they could make a go of it.

Then he looked at Cho...and thought about the whole situation. Cedric had needed to retrieve his girlfriend. Fleur was in tears over not retrieving someone.... That left...Krum.

"Do you think Hermione is down there?" Harry asked.

"No," Sirius said with some confidence. "Not after you threatened to remove Viktor's genitals for what he did. Not even Albus could be that stupid...." He sounded less confident when he stopped speaking.

"When it comes to that old man, there is no end to his stupidity. Did I tell you what happened to him last week? Peeves was out causing chaos again in the Transfiguration wing. He managed to rip out a tapestry and nearly destroy another. The Headmaster arrived and

asked him to stop. Peeves splattered Dumbledore's robes with something he stole from Snape. The shiny robes began to dissolve. Well, Dumbledore lost his temper and cast a spell at Peeves. The poltergeist zipped off into a wall. The Bloody Baron, who was coming to deal with Peeves, caught the spell instead. He was exorcised. Since then...well, Peeves has been unstoppable."

Sirius had a disgruntled smile on his face. Such a wonderful, terrible prank. Sirius still didn't know what had turned Dumbledore's fortunes around recently, but the man had been suffering. A broken hip, the burning of half his private library when Fawkes experienced an inopportune Burning Day, and a near constant stream of food poisonings. Some days the old warlock woke up with purple spots on his face...but he denied having venereal pox. Few believed him given the number of outbreaks he kept having recently.

The Aurors, Sirius had heard, had even discretely started interviewing many of the prostitutes in and around Knockturn to see if there was an epidemic.

Sirius looked up when the time ended and Krum was nowhere to be seen. Karkaroff sent off some kind of messaging spell. Krum resurfaced a few minutes later and began bellowing in Bulgarian.

Eventually Karkaroff turned to Dumbledore and began yelling, this time in English.

None of this filtered over to the spectators, save for the odd word here and there.

Harry went from looking ready to kill to merely being angry to having a slight smile on his face. Eventually, when a merman brought up a little blonde girl and Hermione, Harry had a wide smile on his face.

The scores made the crowd rather loud. Krum somehow managed twenty points. Fleur got fifteen. Diggory got forty-five.

Harry waited for Hermione to wake up and then saw her eyes latch onto Krum. Her hand went for her wand, before Madam Pomfrey took the girl into a medical tent.

"Krum didn't even notice," Harry said. "Seekers have great situational awareness. His is supposed to be better than most."

Sirius frowned. "I don't understand."

"He didn't notice she was about to curse him. He didn't notice!"

"So?"

"The spell I cast on him works. He can't see her. She was ten feet away and he didn't see her...."

"Huh?"

"I cast a family spell on Krum. If I couldn't have full satisfaction for what he did to Hermione, I could at least attempt to keep her safe."

"And...it did what, this spell?"

"It was an odd form of memory charm. I deleted his ability to see or think about Hermione Granger."

"Really?" Sirius said, smiling a bit.

"The goddamn...Bulgarian. Plenty of evidence of what he did. He impregnated her...against her will. She was drunk and unable to consent after her screaming row with Ron at the Winter Ball...and he didn't even care he would be having a child with her. 'Too many to count,' he said. Bulgarian with diplomatic immunity because of this...ridiculous tournament. Free to date rape anyone he likes, anyone who catches his eye. Our Ministry doesn't even count such a thing as a crime. A drunk witch, according to them, is a willing witch."

"Especially if she has 'diminished rights'...."

Harry's face screwed up in anger. "Their horrible term for the muggleborn. You have to have a certain number of generations of magical heritage to enjoy full protections. I'm surprised no

muggleborn had ever tried to overthrow the government,” Harry said.

Sirius sighed and watched the scene unfold.

“Dumbledore with all his magical power and he refuses to use it. They coopted him, neutered him when they made him Chief Warlock. Made it so he wouldn’t do much they wouldn’t like, even though he could duel most of them at the same time and hold his own. He’s weak willed and undeserving of his magical strength,” Harry said.

“All that power and he does nothing with it,” Sirius agreed.

Dumbledore spoke with Krum and eventually seemed to figure out that Krum had been right in front of Granger underwater and couldn’t see her. He cast a diagnostic charm on Krum and nodded his head.

When he tried to break the enchantment, Krum keeled over and collapsed. That caught Harry’s attention.

“That’s a start,” Harry said. “They’ll break it eventually, but Krum...well he won’t be precisely the same person he was before.”

“A little harsh?” Sirius asked. He had once tried to kill an enemy through a prank. He didn’t want Harry to experience that kind of darkness, to make these kinds of mistakes.

“I sat with my best friend in January. I held her hand in the Infirmary while she cried. Pomfrey cast the spell to cause the miscarriage. No. After that, I don’t consider any non-lethal action against Krum too harsh. She lost her virginity to him. She’ll never be able to form a handfasting bond with anyone but him...and he’s an idiotic playboy. She conceived a child before she was able to care for it...and magic has a way of punishing those who waste magical potential. Pomfrey told me that Hermione may never be able to conceive a magical child again.”

Sirius blinked a few times and then acknowledged that Krum deserved whatever happened to him. Children...well, children were more precious than gold.

“Shall we go and collect Hermione?”

Harry nodded. “I hope she’s calmed down.”

“We can deal with your idiot of a Headmaster later today or tomorrow. Krum got at Hermione when she was unallied. But now...now she is protected by the Potters and the Blacks. Dumbledore knew about this attack and still assigned Hermione to be rescued by Krum. He will have to answer for this.”

Harry had his wand out and transfigured a pine cone into a small boat, large enough for three. He and Sirius stepped inside. It took no time at all to part Hermione from Madam Pomfrey and take her back to the castle.

It took far longer, well into the afternoon, for her to stop crying.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

The Third Task of the Triwizard Tournament began under a dark cloud. The original contestant from Durmstrang, Viktor Krum, was in a German hospital having spell damage reversed. Privately, people in the know commented he’d never be able to fly or cast a spell again. Breaking an odd, relatively inoffensive memory charm had scrambled his mind. It took him two months just to learn how to lift a spoon to his mouth.

Likewise, reports of his attacks on Muggleborn witches in Spain, Italy, Ireland, and Britain came out. He’d used the prejudice against the Muggleborn to have his way with any number of witches, aged eleven to fifteen, since he became famous. Revolting pedophile using his fame and the world’s prejudice to get his rocks off.

Finally, there was the complaint by Sirius Black against Albus Dumbledore concerning the ally of his family, Hermione Granger. Dumbledore was alleged to have put a sexual assault victim in close proximity to her supposed attacker as part of an entertainment. The result was bruising for both men, but Sirius had spent more than a decade in Azkaban. Dumbledore lost a lot more clout, while Sirius, in

the end, came out better than he started. Indeed, Dumbledore was finally knocked from his perch at Hogwarts for his mismanagement of the Triwizard Tournament, in addition to his cover-ups of a number of security lapses over the last few years at the school.

Harry sat in the stands while his godfather sat with the Board of Governors, who had also been gutted in the wake of the Dumbledore scandal. He perked up a bit when Ludo Bagman walked out and began the Final Task.

“Good evening, gentle witches and wizards. Tonight, we bring this great tradition of the Triwizard Tournament to a close.”

Harry breathed a bit easier at that. Hermione had lost too much. The school had become a laughing stock because of Dumbledore. Even Harry had nearly been sucked into this madness.

“Tonight our three contestants, Cedric Diggory of Hogwarts, Fleur Delacoeur of Beauxbatons, and substitute Klaus Schmidt of Durmstrang will make their way through this grand maze. Aside from the challenge of getting to the center, there are traps, creatures, puzzles, and many more diversions inside....”

Harry grunted. It sounded boring, about as watchable as the Second Task. Then he watched a lake surface, now he would watch a hedgerow undulate in the light wind. Did no one take the audience into account when designing this fiasco?

“At the cannon blast, Mr. Diggory will enter first. At the next blast, Mr. Schmidt will enter. Then Ms. Delacoeur.”

A cannon blasted and Cedric was off.

Harry wondered how Hermione was doing. She had left Hogwarts after the Second Task. It was unlikely, now that her parents knew what had happened, that they would permit her to return.

But...the girl was motivated and could learn from books. Sirius had even mentioned hiring some tutors for Hermione in the summer and beyond.

He felt sad for her, for what had happened.

Just a small amount of time, less than ten minutes, to cause so much ruination. She couldn't even remember what should have been a special moment. No, she was drunk out of her skull, with her robes tugged up in a dark spot of one of the castle gardens, in full view of anyone who might have walked by.

Harry wondered if he should pay a visit to a certain hospital in Germany and cast a severing curse.

He barely heard the second cannon blast, but he did notice the jolting sensation – a Portkey – when he was picked up and hurled through space.

He landed with a great thump. His legs gave out, throwing him to the soft earth in a jumble of body parts. But, he was rolling and moving almost as soon as gravity finished with him.

He had his wand out and was looking around like a cornered animal.

This was his third trip by Portkey and the first two had been tense times for him (a trial for Sirius and a World Cup competition that ended with a Death Eater attack).

He evaded a stunning spell that came from the shadows. Then Harry twisted and saw Peter Pettigrew with a dark wand in his hand, carrying around a grotesque slug in his arms.

"Careful, Pettigrew!" the slug commanded.

It was Voldemort somehow.

"He must be alive for this ritual to work...."

That was enough for Harry. He ripped off his lucky necklace and scattered four carved stones on the ground. He incanted a familiar spell, but twisted his wand in an odd manner.

The golden dome erupted, but this time Harry was outside it.

Peter Pettigrew and his pet slug were inside it.

It happened so quickly, Peter couldn't stop the spell he was trying to cast. He brought his hand down in a vicious swish and flick maneuver. But the wand and then most of his fist disappeared inside the golden dome.

The ward's color darkened and the energetic shield thickened.

The traitor fell to the ground screaming. The bundle in his good arm dropped to the grass and began to roll. A portion of it attempted to cross the ward. When the slug-like construct was damaged a revolting blackish-gray smoke erupted from the creation.

Voldemort. His essence. His evil.

Harry sat down on the grass and watched Pettigrew pass out from the pain. He looked at his wand for a moment before he cast a stupefy at the golden shield.

It shimmered darker gold...and grew inward.

Harry smiled.

His work on inverting this ward had been worth every second. When he had used it last year to save his godfather, it had been a dangerous thing. He could have easily run out of oxygen before that idiot Fudge caved. But, now, he sat in the oxygen and Pettigrew and Voldemort's shade sat inside. Pettigrew would suffocate in short order...and Voldemort would likely be annihilated if his shade touched the ward. As the ward was powered up, it would grow inward, shrinking the safe area inside.

Harry picked up a bouquet of dead flowers from a grave stone. He threw them at the golden ward. It flashed again and grew a fraction of an inch.

He looked at the massive cauldron bubbling away twenty feet to his right. He got to his feet and levitated the whole mess over top of the ward. He released the spell and gravity accelerated it downward.

The ward flashed a deep, satisfied golden color. The rat and the shade lost a few inches in every direction. The comatose Pettigrew was very close to losing a foot now.

Then Harry looked at his watch. More than twenty minutes had passed since the Third Task began. How was he still alone here? Didn't anyone realize he was gone? Sirius had been kept busy with the Governors, but he'd been sitting next to Fred and George Weasley at the Task. Did they take this as a joke?

Harry walked around the graveyard and threw things into the ward.

A gaudy headstone dropped from a great height enlarged the ward enough to cut off Pettigrew's foot. That irritated the shade to no end.

More than an hour had passed before Harry had the ward large enough to threaten Pettigrew's rotted brain and skull.

He sat back down again. He knew Sirius would eventually come for him. Perhaps even the Ministry's red-cloaked idiots would accompany him. He just wished they'd hurry up.

The adrenaline in his bloodstream was gone. He was about ready to collapse from the stress and the exhaustion.

He twisted around before the pop of the apparition had even reached his ears. It was like he'd felt the magic.

Sirius, flush and terrified, ran and latched onto Harry moment later. "I'm alright." He pointed to the dome. "They're not."

Sirius glanced over. "The rat!"

Harry tugged the man back down to a seated position. "Stay away from that. You wouldn't want to lose a hand or a foot, right?"

Sirius looked over Pettigrew's condition. Then he calmed down a bit.

"Sorry it took so long. The new Minister is a dithering fool. The Aurors were getting orders from a half dozen folks and couldn't settle on what to do. And then Dumbledore showed up after the WIZARDING Wireless explained you'd disappeared."

"Well...I'm surprised you made it here at all."

"I can be persistent," Sirius said.

"Should we wait for witnesses?"

Sirius nodded and then relaxed a bit. Pettigrew was still out from the shock to his battered body. About the only thing he still possessed were his head and torso.

Near midnight a small team of Aurors finally arrived. Pettigrew had long since suffocated. The small black cloud seemed to rage inside the ward.

Sirius took over once the Ministry idiots arrived.

"You, Shackbolt, you come over to this dome. The rest of you, keep your distance for now."

The tall black Auror came toward Sirius with a puzzled expression.

"What in Merlin's green earth took you so long?"

"Politics," the Auror said.

"About?"

"Who would lead the team, what the mission was, how many people would come, whether the Minister should be here...just about everything."

"Has Bones gone senile?"

“No, the Director of Magical Law Enforcement is in the hospital, has been since yesterday morning. She came down with dragon pox....”

“So...what, Scrimgeour?”

The tall black Auror shrugged. It was as good as a yes.

“I think we need a strong person to be our new Ambassador to Magical China....”

The Auror looked a bit surprised. “Our last three diplomats there were assassinated by terrorists.”

“Your point?”

“Such a threat would be...tantamount to a death sentence.”

“The dithering permitted by that useless lump could have cost my godson his life, had he not been prepared to handle problems.”

The Auror looked perturbed but said nothing else.

Sirius led him to a spot near the golden dome. “The dead man inside there is Peter Pettigrew, the betrayer of the Potter Family, the Black Family, and probably many others.”

The Auror seemed surprised. To actually have evidence, to actually see the one who betrayed the Boy-Who-Lived.... He had thought it all a bit convenient that Sirius had a supposedly dead friend who got him landed in Azkaban. But...this.

“I see. What’s that wraith-like mist?”

“A wraith.”

The Auror rolled his eyes.

“Of whom?”

“Harry?” Sirius called out.

“Yes,” the young man said as he stood up.

“What is this wraith?”

“Not too sure,” Harry said. “Something Pettigrew had trapped in a construct of some sort. Never can tell what a crazed murderer might keep around.”

Sirius and Harry had decided not to mention the V-word. Neither wanted to inflame passions when it was just as easy to take care of this horrible thing. Neither wanted or needed credit for killing Voldemort a second time.

“Alright. What are we supposed to do now?”

“Fire a spell at the dome, Auror,” Harry said.

“Okay.”

The man sent a stunner. The dome flashed gold and the interior of the safe space shrunk.

“What’s the point?” the Auror asked.

“We will use this ward to destroy the wraith,” Harry said.

“I have standing orders that such phenomena are to be captured for study by the Department of Mysteries....”

“Summon an Unspeakable then,” Sirius said, “and I will speak with him.”

The Auror began to backpedal. No one liked to actually work with Unspeakables. They were an odd bunch, Sirius knew from brief experience.

Harry became tired of waiting. He summoned a massive funerary statue and before it hit him, it ran smack into the ward. That was enough to tip the scale. The small safe area inside the ward

disappeared. The black wraith-like mist disappeared as did Peter Pettigrew's body.

"That's handled," Harry said.

The Auror sighed, likely thinking of the upcoming excess paperwork he'd need to file.

"They are going to want to speak with you," he said to Harry.

"It would be a pleasure."

"Can we get out of here?" Sirius asked.

The Auror eventually nodded.

Harry released the ward and bent down to collect his four ward stones. The Auror held out his hand, trying to collect them. Harry shook his head and said, "Family magic."

The Wizengamot had protected familiar magic hundreds of years earlier. They wouldn't violate the rules now, even if they craved knowledge of what Harry kept doing, because they didn't want to lose exclusivity over their own magics. The Ollivander proxy would never consent, as wand making might become a common trade. Few of the other innovative families would consent for knowledge of their spells or wards or enchantments to get out. Indeed, the Zabini proxy had strict instructions not to let anything infringe on familiar magics, as revelation of such magic would convict the current Family Head of several counts of husband killing.

Harry got back to Hogwarts with a scowl on his face. It was already past one in the morning. He'd been kidnapped around seven.

This was clearly unacceptable.

Sirius pushed Harry toward the castle and said, "I'll be back tomorrow afternoon. Sleep in tomorrow if you need to. If any jokers from the school or the government want to talk to you, they can wait until I get here."

"I know my rights," Harry said.

"But you also get cranky and shoot your mouth off from time to time. Keep it on a low simmer and I'll be back around three or so. I need to spend some time with our solicitor in the morning."

Harry nodded and walked inside the castle.

Sirius had a long walk back to the ward line. On the one hand, he was glad that the Voldemort problem was likely over. On the other...the government in Britain was less than competent.

What to do?

What to do.

First, determine who had done this? Was the kidnapper Pettigrew? Had he snuck around with an active portkey while in his animagus form? Had he entered Harry's name – or was there another agent? Were there accomplices that had to be tracked down?

Sirius thought back to the suspect pool. Could some of them been under the Imperius – or could a swap out have occurred with Polyjuice?

Bagman, Karkaroff, everyone needed checking. He'd even look to see if someone had used an Imperius on McGonagall, Flitwick, or Moody.

He wanted answers now. His godson had nearly died, again, this night.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

Harry Potter sat at the Gryffindor table eating his portion of the Opening Feast when he felt eyes on him. He turned to look around when he saw a rather short, heavy set woman sitting at the Governors' table glaring at him.

He thought back to what Sirius had said of the various members. He had little good to say about any of them, but Harry remembered nothing about such a...distinctive looking woman.

He returned to his roast chicken and potatoes.

The feeling of being watched did not abate, but Harry refused to acknowledge it.

After the new Headmistress, McGonagall, dismissed everyone for the night. He made his way back to Gryffindor Tower. But a quiet evening was not his to have.

The large woman tugged on his elbow before he hit the stairs.

“Stand right there, Mr. Potter. I desire to speak with you....”

“And you are?”

“I am a Governor of this school. You may refer to me as Madam Umbridge.”

Harry nodded.

“What did you wish to say?”

“You are certainly a rude child, aren’t you?”

“I wish to return to my dorm. If you have nothing to say....”

Her look of loathing almost caused Harry to step backward. “You, Mr. Potter, are a destabilizing influence. My mentor, Mister Fudge, is a pauper and a disgrace because of you. I barely clung onto a position in the Department of Education. I don’t like you. I don’t like what you represent. I abhor your politics....”

“Madam, I don’t even know what my politics are. I will mention to my godfather your comments. Perhaps you’d care to say the same things to an adult wizard.”

“I would watch myself if I were you, Potter.”

Harry turned around and melted back into the crowd leaving the Great Hall. Harry wondered about this woman. What did she gain by what she said this evening? Was she stupid enough to think her bile would hurt him or unnerve him?

He'd gotten justice for Hermione from Krum. He'd killed the two main betrayers of the Potter Family. He knew what duty was.

A flunky, a bureaucrat could do something to stop him?

No.

Nothing could stop a Potter.

His grandfather, his father, and even he had spent decades standing against greater evils. But...Harry realized it was the lesser evils that permitted the greater to exist.

A rapist using anti-Muggleborn laws to skate through life. A vindictive hack of a politician clinging to power just so that she could threaten and try to cow her enemies.

These were the little things that became big things. These were the things that a Potter fought against.

These were the things Harry vowed himself, his life, and his family to combat...to end.

He now understood what his particular incarnation of the Potter Duty would be. He had finished off his Greater Evil; now he was free to end to the Lesser, to rip them from their dark places of hiding, their places of strength and anonymity.

He would expose and destroy and cull.

He was a Potter by birth, by magic, and by duty.

X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X-X

The ancient shopkeeper walked into his back room. Contrary to what the front seemed, the back stretched almost beyond the visible range of the human eye. Not that human limitations mattered to the shopkeeper.

He wasn't a true ancient, not like the Olympian Gods, but he wasn't a young hellion either.

This was his third period of punishment. He'd existed in this temporality more than thirteen thousand years.

He began sifting through the boxes of 'new' merchandise. He sorted through old books and trinkets, various magical amulets and contraptions.

His hand stopped when he tugged one particular book from the new accessions.

This book triggered a memory, a nostalgic feeling.

The book was well over a thousand years old, in poor condition, but the blood bonding was still in place.

The word "Potter" was just barely visible on the front cover. A Grimoire, then.

He thumbed the thick book. Had he sold it before? Had he caused some havoc in the world with it?

He stopped sorting through items and took the volume back into the main part of his store. He set it in a bare spot on one of his shelves.

Then he went behind the counter and pulled out his manifest. It took him more than an hour to find entry number 147, the Potter Grimoire.

He read up on the meeting, over seven hundred years ago. He felt a tug of amusement at how the boy had almost touched the Blue Croon Stone. The shopkeeper was permitted to keep it on display as part of his punishment. It ranked as his finest achievement, a wonderful

piece of demonology. He had hundreds still out in the world...and these wonderful, horrible curses were what we was still being punished for.

But...back then...he stopped the young Potter from touching the stone. He cared more about acquiring another galleon for freedom than for the pleasure of trapping another soul here with him in his chamber of punishment.

He wondered if he would stop such an inquisitive young man again.

He wondered if this Potter Grimoire turning up meant there would be another Potter coming into his shop soon.

He knew that many of the more than one thousand items he had sold had been peddled by him more than once.

Certain magical items had more resonance than others, certain things needed to be out in the world more than others.

He supposed the boy, more than half a millennium earlier, had passed his test. He wished he could open the book and read it, but that was denied him as part of his punishment.

He ceased staring at the book and shut his manifest.

He sat down to think and plan. He was here, trapped, but he had means and occasional opportunity to cause chaos. What could he do?

The fallen angel Adzraeus, still working off his current punishment, had a long catalog of crimes. Spreading magic far and wide, one thousand years of torment. For killing humanity with pleasurable torments, a term spent tending the fires of Tenebras. Now, for creating wonderful, euphoric curses, an indeterminate sentence returning valued magic to worthy souls. A torment of unknown length, probably worse than direct pain or the hellfires of Tenebras licking at his feet and shins.

The life of a shopkeeper was uncertainty. Boredom. The slow death of his memories.

The Powers-That-Be could no longer directly set individual actors on new courses, so they used proxies. Adzraeus had been punished three times for following his Master's commandments and suggestions.

He wouldn't be caught a fourth time. He wouldn't do what he was commanded.

No...he would do what he wanted.

He sat in his chair, and pondered creative destruction, delicious chaos...and then he forgot it all. The Potter Grimoire, entry number 147, all of it left his memory.

So...he sat and waited. Sat and waited.